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# Editorial: celebrating Australian social work: 66 years young

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## EDITORIAL

### Celebrating Australian Social Work – 66 Years Young

If *Australian Social Work* was a person she would be 66 this year. With the first volume published in 1947 (under the title *Australian Journal of Social Work*), she would now be eligible for the age pension, and almost certainly would be a case study in successful and (very) active ageing. In June this year I presented on the Journal at a ‘Meet the Editors’ seminar held at the Joint Social Work Education and Research Conference in the UK. Of all the international journals represented, *Australian Social Work* was the most well established; older even than the *British Journal of Social Work*, which was first published in 1971.

If you have the time, a journey through the Journal’s back catalogue is rewarding. All volumes, bar the first, are available on the Taylor and Francis online site (accessible free of charge to members of the Australian Association of Social Workers (AASW) – just login as a member and go to the publications page). Dipping in and out of various issues provides a tantalising insight into the “change and continuity” – to borrow a phrase from Chamberlain (1988) – of the profession in Australia. Take this definition of social work provided by Greig Smith in 1948:

The term, Social Work, denotes that branch of human activity which is concerned with the difficulties of socially, economically or personally maladjusted persons who are themselves unable, out of their own resources to make such adjustments as might enable them to lead normally satisfying lives (Greig Smith, 1948, p. 3).

Even back then he recognised that some readers might want to “attack Mr Greig Smith in his pillory” (Greig Smith, 1948, p. 4) for this definition. Other notable contributions reflect the prevailing concerns of the profession at the time. In “On Relationship” Travis (1954) sought to integrate understandings of the professional relationship into contemporary systems-based theorising of social casework, recognising that the period of “expecting everything to be cured by relationship alone” had passed (Travis, 1954, p. 20). In 1967 Chamberlain supported the idea that social workers should step outside their traditional casework role and engage in social action. She asked, “Have we, in fact, so concentrated on the individualised approach that social causation has been entirely overlooked?” (Chamberlain, 1967, p. 25). In the early 1990s, Peile (1994) foreshadowed the increasing significance of reflective practice when he challenged the positivist separation of theory, practice, and research in social work.

You might ask: where are the ground breaking papers of today? All you need to do, I suggest, is look to the list of the most read recent articles. Four of the top five relate to Indigenous social work. The article on social workers’ experiences working alongside Aboriginal people by Bennett, Zubrzycki, and Brown (2011), which won the Norm Smith Publication in Social Work Research Award, has been downloaded over 3,500 times. This article was one of a series on Australian Indigenous Social Work and Social Policy, which spanned two volumes in 2011. This followed the landmark article by Green and Baldry (2008), “Building Indigenous Australian social work”, which is one of the Journal’s all time high citation articles. And in this current issue of the Journal, we have some further contributions to this emerging strength in Australian social work scholarship.

By all accounts 2013 has been another remarkable year for the Journal. We published 37 articles and 13 book reviews and featured special sections on Working with Children, and

**Social Work and Sustainable Ecological Living.** Over 20% of all papers submitted this year were from overseas, reflecting the growing international standing of the Journal. This is also demonstrated by the high rates of article downloads from South Asia, North America, and Europe. This standing is further reflected in the increased Impact Factor for 2012: 0.5, up from 0.466 in 2011. This Impact Factor relates to the average number of times an article in *Australian Social Work* was cited (in another paper) during the 2010-2011 calendar years. This is a great achievement given that 2011 was our first year of being included in the ISI Journal Citation Reports. This meant we were ranked 30/38 social work journals, nestled between the *European Journal of Social Work* and the *Clinical Social Work Journal*.

As Chris Bigby (2009) has previously identified, while increasing the Impact Factor is a key goal for the journal and valuable for improving and promoting Australian social work scholarship, care needs to be taken to ensure that the Journal stays relevant to practitioners and encourages new authors to venture into writing and publishing. To this end we have seen an increase in papers submitted in the Practice, Policy, and Perspectives section of the Journal. Bigby provided an outline of the expectations of articles in this section in her editorial in 2009, and more contributions to this section are encouraged. There is also a hidden element to the support provided to new authors. This involves the work of reviewers, members of the Journal's Australian and International Editorial Boards, and the Editors in providing feedback to authors on their manuscripts. In most cases reviewers devote considerable time and energy to giving constructive feedback. A list of the reviewers in 2013 can be found at the end of this Issue, and we are most grateful for their contribution. Most people involved in this process appreciate that less positive feedback can be difficult to take on board, particularly when a paper has been rejected. I'd hazard a guess that most, if not all, academic writers have had at least one paper rejected. (Certainly, the first paper that I submitted to *Australian Social Work* was rejected – back in 1989.). It is also the case that very few, if any, papers are accepted immediately. Some changes are always required. The energy and investment of all those involved in writing, reviewing, and editing the Journal, even though this may be “behind the scenes” work, has enormous flow-on benefits for social work as a profession in Australia.

That said, one person – Professor Christine Bigby – stands head and shoulders above all others in her contribution to this journal and to social work in Australia in recent years. Since taking on the Editor role in 2006, Chris provided the Journal with the leadership needed to bring it to its current international standing. Her unwavering commitment to publishing high quality manuscripts and to ensuring academic integrity has won her many admirers. Less well known is the energy she has devoted to help new authors realise their potential. Chris resigned the Editor role this year, although fortunately she will continue to serve on the Editorial Board. Chris has also been appointed as Editor of the new journal, *Research and Practice in Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities* (another Taylor and Francis publication) and all involved with *Australian Social Work* wish her well in this exciting endeavour.

This year, we also farewelled Associate Professor Lou Harms, who resigned as Chair of the Editorial Board in June. Lou brought enormous dedication, skill, and diplomacy to her role and provided considerable support to the Editorial Team. This year we also said thank you and farewell to longstanding Editorial Board members: Phillip Swain and Sandy Taylor, as well as Jane Maidment who served for many years, with great panache, as Reviews Editor. 2014 will be a year of transition for the Journal: new Editorial Board members, a new Chair of the Editorial Board and, indeed, a new Editor. What will be constant, however, is a

commitment to produce a high quality publication that reflects the ambitions and concerns of social work, both in Australia and internationally.

**Mark Hughes**  
Editor

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